NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-1312 AUGUST 19,1976
WILLIAM LEAVITT

CANDIDATE FORD: ON HIS OWN, AT LAST

ANNCR: GERALD FORD HAS WON HIS PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION AFTER A LONG, HARD FIGHT WITH HIS CHALLENGER, FORMER CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR RONALD REAGAN. VOA NEWS ANALYST WILLIAM LEAVITT HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS.

VOICE: IN THE END, MISTER FORD'S CONVENTION VICTORY SEEMED EASY. HE WON AT KANSAS CITY BY A COMFORTABLE MARGIN OF VOTES. YET THE DRAMA OF AN INCUMBENT PRESIDENT HAVING TO BEAT BACK A FORMIDABLE CHALLENGE WAS UNPRECEDENTED IN RECENT AMERICAN HISTORY. THE LAST TIME IT HAPPENED WAS (BACK) IN 1912, WHEN REPUBLICAN PRESIDENT WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT WON RENOMINATION AGAINST A CHALLENGE BY HIS PRESIDENTIAL PREDECESSOR, THEODORE ROOSEVELT. THAT YEAR, THEODORE ROOSEVELT LAUNCHED A THIRD, SEPARATE, PARTY AND RAN FOR PRESIDENT ANYWAY. THE RESULT WAS AN EASY VICTORY FOR THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE, WOODROW WILSON.

THIS YEAR THERE'S VIRTUALLY NO PROSPECT OF SUCH A REPUBLICAN PARTY SPLIT. THE RACE BETWEEN GERALD FORD AND RONALD REAGAN WAS MORE A STRUGGLE OF PERSONALITIES THAN A BATTLE OF IDEOLOGIES. BOTH MEN ARE DEEPLY CONSERVATIVE. AND THERE'S CLEAR RECOGNITION INSIDE THE REPUBLICAN PARTY THAT ONLY A UNITED EFFORT CAN OVERCOME THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE, GOVERNOR JIMMY CARTER. IT'S A FACT OF AMERICAN POLITICAL LIFE THAT REGISTERED REPUBLICAN PARTY MEMBERS FORM ONLY ABOUT TWENTY PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE. ANY REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MUST APPEAL TO DEMOCRATS AND INDEPENENT VOTERS IN ORDER TO WIN. (OPT) BOTH DWIGHT EISENHOWER AND RICHARD NIXON BUILT THEIR VICTORIES ON THAT FORMULA. THE SAME TASK LIES AHEAD FOR PRESIDENT FORD. (END OPT)

MISTER FORD HAS WON THE TOUGHEST BATTLE OF HIS POLITICAL CAREER. HE NOW STANDS SQUARELY AS THE ELECTED LEADER OF HIS PARTY. HE ENTERED THE PRESIDENCY BY AN UNPRECEDENTED ROUTE. HE WAS APPOINTED VICE-PRESIDENT AND SUCCEEDED TO THE PRESIDENCY ON THE RESIGNATION OF HIS PREDECESSOR. AND FOR TWO YEARS, MUCH OF GERALD FORD'S ENERGY HAS HAD TO BE EXPENDED ESTABLISHING HIS AURA AS PRESIDENT -- WHILE AT THE SAME TIME COPING WITH THE CRISES AND DECISIONS THAT GO WITH THE JOB.

NOW THE CAMPAIGN BEGINS. MISTER FORD IS A SEASONED POLITICIAN AND A REALIST. HE KNOWS THAT, FOR THE MOMENT, HE LAGS FAR BEHIND JIMMY CARTER IN THE PUBLIC-OPINION POLLS. BUT GERALD FORD HOPES THAT HIS BRAND OF CONSERVATISM MATCHES THE AMERICAN MOOD, AND THAT THE VOTERS WILL CHOOSE HIM, AS A KNOWN QUANTITY, OVER GOVERNOR CARTER, A DETERMINED AND SKILLED CAMPAIGNER WHO WON THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY NOMINATION ON THE STRENGTH OF HIS APPEAL AS A NEW FACE IN AMERICAN POLITICS.

SO THE BATTLE IS DRAWN, AND THE MOST THAT CAN BE SAID NOW IS THAT THE WINNER WILL BE THE CANDIDATE WHO MOST PRECISELY DEFINES -- AND APPEALS TO -- THE CURRENT AMERICAN POLITICAL IMPULSE. THE FORTUNES OF MISTER FORD, AND MISTER CARTER, NOW DEPEND ON WHETHER CONTINUITY, OR CHANGE, IS WHAT AMERICANS WANT MOST.

WJL/JS